Varsities finding ways to handle disease

IN relation to the article "Ministry warns of leptospirosis risk at natural water spots" (*The Star*, June 10), we wish to bring to the public's attention that Universiti Putra Malaysia, together with several other public and private universities as well as a few government agencies, are currently undertaking multidisciplinary research on tackling the disease.

As highlighted in the article, the risk of getting leptospirosis is present when one engages in water activities in places like rivers, ponds or waterfalls. The risk of getting this bacterial infection can also happen in non-water related places where hygiene and cleanliness are compromised, such as in dirty eateries.

We concur with what was said by the Health Deputy Director-General (Public Health) Datuk Dr Lokman Hakim Sulaiman, that when natural water spots tested negative for the presence of the bacteria *Leptospira spp.*, which causes the disease, that need not necessarily mean that the risk of contracting leptospirosis is zero.

As a response to this distressing situation, our research which started less than a year ago has been designed to investigate deeper and to fill the gaps on understanding the nature of the disease, which we believe will assist the Ministry of Health in better managing it.

The Malaysia Leptospirosis Research Network aims to coordinate leptospirosis researchers so that more impactful research can be achieved. We have embarked on strategic and integrated research on tackling leptospirosis incorporating fundamental, clinical and public health aspects.

Among the aspects of study in our research are looking for potential biomarkers and immune markers in patients, developing detection methods for early diagnosis of the disease, conducting studies on the knowledge, attitude, practice and belief among groups of high-risk people, and investigating carriage by rats and other potential mammals (including studying their habitat selections and movement patterns).

With this coordinated research, we hope to have better knowledge in the fundamentals of leptospirosis, better clinical diagnosis and management, to be able to provide prognosis, have better and evidence-based public health measures, and effective as well as sustainable animal reservoir control.

PROF DR ZAMBERI SEKAWI
Chairman of Malaysia Leptospirosis Research Network
Universiti Putra Malaysia